

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

true love PROJECT

HOW THE GOSPEL DEFINES YOUR PURITY

True Love Project

True Love Waits envisioned for a new generation

NASHVILLE (BP) — In July 1994, more than 210,000 cards from teenagers pledging to remain sexually pure were displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

In the years that followed, the True Love Waits movement witnessed millions of young people in the U.S. and around the world commit their sexual purity to God. In addition, many who compromised their sexual purity in the past experienced the promise of hope and restoration through Jesus.

Building on that legacy, the program is being relaunched 20 years later through a new resource called The True Love Project, a video-driven Bible study for students written by author and speaker Clayton King.

The True Love Project is not simply another Bible study for students on the topic of sex and virginity. Rather, it is a "summons" for the next generation of students to understand their sexuality in light of the Gospel, said Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry at Nashville-based



KING



TRUEBLOOD

see PROJECT on p. 9

Ala. pastor charged in wife's murder

BIRMINGHAM, AL. (BP) — After more than five months of near silence, Alabama investigators in the Karen Shahán murder case made a bold move Jan. 1 with the arrest of her husband Richard Shahán at the Nashville International Airport.

Richard Shahán, former children and families pastor at First Church in Birmingham, Al., was attempting to board a flight to Frankfurt, Germany, reportedly on his way to work with Bible Mission International (BMI) for three years.

The Alabama Baptist and other news sources previously reported Richard Shahán's plans for departing the country to develop teaching materials and discipleship

resources through BMI to be distributed throughout former Soviet countries, but the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office said recent developments in the case led to the issuance of a murder warrant for Richard Shahán, according to the myfoxal.com news website.

Homeland Security ICE agents then arrested Shahán the next day before he boarded his flight, out of a concern that he may try to avoid murder charges by fleeing from Germany to Russia. Officials did not say why they believed he would flee Germany but they did note that there is no formal extradition treaty between the United States and Russia.

Details as to why Shahán

"Some of the inferences that were put out there in the news conference

made it sound like

Richard was trying to leave the country and never come back ... The reality is they've always looked at Richard, and they didn't bother to look any further than that."

John Lentine

Shahán's attorney

was arrested at this point in the investigation are limited, but Chief Jim Roberson of

see CHARGED on p. 11

Mission:Dignity helps to serve needy retirees

DALLAS (BP) — All Anna Streeter saw in her refrigerator was three hot dogs and one bottle of apple juice. She was hungry and wanted to go to the grocery store, but her bank account was as empty as her icebox.

Streeter wasn't used to needing to ask others for assistance. For more than 30 years, she had graciously ministered to those in need through the work of Southern Baptists churches — but now, at age 84, she had little left to live on besides a small pension and a modest Social Security check.

Unexpected major repairs on her 21-year-old car and several medical bills used up the little she had saved. Streeter was facing a trio of troubles. If she was going to survive, she needed to get help.

Filled with belief that God would provide, Streeter called to check on the status of her application for Mission:Dignity, which provides financial assistance to retired pastors, workers, and their widows who are struggling to make ends meet. She was relieved to discover she was eligible for assistance, but discouraged to learn that her check wouldn't arrive for three weeks.

After a long silence, Streeter asked, "Is there any way to get it sooner? I don't have any food." Members of GuideStone's Financial Assistance Department, which administers Mission:Dignity, gathered a few gift cards for emergency groceries, picked up lunch, and headed over to bring hope to Streeter.

When she opened the door and saw the smiling faces and assistance from Mission:Dignity, she began to weep. Finally, help had arrived and those three weeks weren't going to be that long after all.

Streeter isn't the only one who needs help. Mission:Dignity proudly serves about 2,000 retired Southern Baptist pastors, workers, and their widows — men and women who faithfully served God's people in small, mostly rural churches and are now struggling to meet their own basic needs.

"We are privileged that

For more information

Visit missiondignitysbc.org, or write to Mission:Dignity, 2401 Cedar Springs Road, Dallas, TX 75201.

the ministry to which we have been entrusted is to provide for these dear servants of the cross in their declining years," said GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins. "More than 60% of the people we serve are widows, with one in four being a pastor's widow over age 85.

"When our generous donors give to Mission:Dignity, they join us in serving as Christ's hand extended to these faithful servants."

Mission:Dignity is funded through direct contributions from churches, Sunday school classes, and individuals. The program receives no Cooperative Program funding. All donations given to Mission:Dignity go directly to help a pastor or his widow in need, with nothing held back for administrative expenses. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

For more information, visit missiondignitysbc.org, or write to Mission:Dignity, 2401 Cedar Springs Road, Dallas, TX 75201.

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

What they know about us

The world has always been a tough place for Christians. Jesus warned us of the consequences of following Him (Matt. 10:22; Luke 6:22). As it has been from the beginning, so it is today.

Open Doors, a Christian organization that monitors religious persecution around the world, recently announced that North Korea is the most faith-hostile country on the planet, followed closely by Somalia.

One news report indicates that a 33-year-old North Korean mother of three was publicly executed before her family for the crime of giving away Bibles. She was apparently not a big-time Bible smuggler, but simply a believer who wanted to share the Good News with others as opportunities arose.

Not only was she killed for her Bible offenses, her parents, husband, and children were condemned to the communist country's dreaded prison system. That's the rule in North Korea — if you offend the Stalinist regime, your family pays the price along with you. Three generations of your family are reportedly confined for life in the North Korean gulag, just to be sure authorities take care of all potential troublemakers you may have influenced.

Another Christian woman disappeared from the same area near the Chinese border, and her husband and children have also not been seen for some time. It is assumed that she suffered the same fate, and that her family is now somewhere in the forlorn vastness of the North Korean gulag.

As evidenced by these and numerous other reports, it would seem an official crackdown on Christians is always underway in North Korea. Reliable statistics on the closed country are hard to come by, but observers believe there are less than 30,000 believers left in the country of 25 million people that was known not so long ago as the "Jerusalem of the East" for its widespread Christian practices.

That was then. Now there is reportedly a special prison camp in North Korea to which Christians are taken for exceptionally harsh treatment by the regime.

In the African nation of Somalia, the leader of a Muslim extremist group recently declared, "All Somali Christians must be killed according to the Islamic law." Sheikh Nur Barud also said sharia (Islamic) law does not recognize Christian converts and that, "we will slaughter them."

True to his word, an Italian nun known as the "Mother Teresa of Africa" for her thirty years of work in Somalia was murdered outside the children's hospital she founded. A British husband and wife helping to educate Somali children were gunned down in front of the school they started. There have been multiple reports of beheadings of Christians.

The rulers of that anarchic country have apparently set a goal of killing or driving out all Christians in the country, and they have largely succeeded.

Christians in the volatile Indian state of Orissa no longer have the opportunity to publicly celebrate Christmas, due to killings and persecutions perpetrated by Hindu extremists in the region. Christians are reportedly able to remain in their homes only if they convert to Hindu when extremist thugs show up at their door. A Christian woman who was driven away but returned from a refugee camp was murdered in short order.

Why are practicing Christians seen as such a threat to so many who would use such extreme violence to silence them? The answer can be found in the Bible, and in history.

When people experience the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ, are baptized in His name, and filled with the Holy Spirit, they fear no earthly power. As a matter of fact, their boldness and righteousness become objects of fear to those who would oppress them.

The enemies of the faith understand how the very name of Jesus can transform entire populations. That's why they are so quick to snuff out Christianity wherever they can. They know what will happen if it's allowed to spread.

Even more so, Satan understands — and he'll use any weapon at his disposal to destroy us.

From our comfortable American churches, let us pray for those bold, righteous Christians around the world who already understand their fate and yet continue to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior. From our secure homes, let us pray for their families, who are also made to endure cruelty and suffering along with their offending relative.

The ranks of the martyrs are increasing daily. From deep within our souls, let us pray that Jesus will be glorified always and all ways, because we know evil will flee before His face.

Don't forget lessons of OT

Marcion of Sinope lived in the second century during some of the most formative years of the early church. The son of a bishop, he was also active as a teacher in the region of Asia Minor. In 144 AD, Marcion parted ways with the Christian community by starting his own movement.

By doing so, he encouraged thousands through his teachings to better appreciate the Bible. There was just one problem.

In 144 AD, Marcion was excommunicated from the church for heresy. What was his crime? Marcion taught his followers to reject the Old Testament entirely. His reason? Marcion thought that the Old Testament represented a god different from the New Testament. One cannot have two gods. Thus, Marcion and his followers read only selective books from the Bible and rejected the 39 books of the Old Testament entirely.

Is the cult of Marcionism still alive and active in our churches? It has become apparent to me over the last seven years of teaching Old Testament Survey that students come to my class with an underappreciation for the text and history of the Old Testament. This stems from the fact that most of their exposure to the Bible, through teaching and preaching, has come largely from the New Testament. For many of my students, the stories of the Old Testament have served as illustration material and have rarely been allowed to speak theologically.

This situation falls dangerously close to what the followers of Marcion practiced in the second century, so what can pastors and teachers do to help their congregations and classrooms grow in their appreciation for the entire Bible?

First, ground your people in the truth that all Scripture is under the inspiration of God and beneficial for preaching, teaching, correction, and spiritual growth (2 Timothy 3:16). For Paul and the other authors of the New Testament, the Bible of their day, the Bible that they read and used in the writing of the books of the New Testament, was the Old Testament.

Secondly, preach and teach from an



Guest opinion
with Greg Smith

entire book of the Old Testament and cover every verse. Will this require a few good commentaries and other resources that assist with understanding the culture, background and history of Israel? Yes, most definitely but as you preach and teach the text and incorporate that information into what you say, you will make the Scriptures come alive for your people.

You will also give them a context for reading the Old Testament on their own, with confidence and the ability to draw appropriate application for their lives.

Thirdly, model life-changing application from the Old Testament in your teaching and preaching. While it is true that some things have changed over salvation history, the Old Testament still contains timeless truths that need to be incorporated into the life of the faithful.

Finally, inspire your flock with the simple but profound truth that God is always the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The "old" of the Old Testament cannot mean that God is somehow "updated" in the pages of the New Testament.

Help make the pages of the Old Testament come alive for your congregation as you focus on the gracious and loving God who has revealed Himself throughout the entire 66 books of the Bible.

Smith is associate vice president for academic administration and associate professor of Bible at The College at Southwestern, the undergraduate school of Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth. He is the author of the upcoming book, *The Testing of God's Sons: The Refining of Faith as a Biblical Theme*, from the B&H Publishing Group of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville.

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Experts offer advice on 'facts' that don't quite add up

NASHVILLE (BP) — Sometimes a preacher or conference speaker gets things wrong.

It may not be in theology but facts like this one, which came halfway through one preacher's recent sermon on marriage: *There's no difference between people sitting in these pews and everyone else when it comes to divorce.*

It made a great sermon illustration but it's not true, said Bradley Wright, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut and author of *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites... and Other Lies You've Been Told.*

Wright, who has been writing about faith and divorce rates since 2006, looked at statistics from the General Social Survey (GSS), a national random survey of Americans taken since the 1970s. Half of the "Nones" people who claim no religious identity, were divorced. Only 42% of self-identified Christians and members of other faiths were divorced.

Catholics were least likely to divorce (35%), followed by mainline Protestants (41%) and evangelicals (46%), Wright reported.

Believers who show up every week for church were even less likely to divorce. Wright found that only about a third of evangelicals (34%) and mainline Protestants (32%) and a quarter of Catholics (23%) who go to church were divorced.

Still, the myth that churchgoers divorce at the same rate as everyone else persists. Wright thinks people pay more attention to bad news than to good news.

"We pay a lot more attention to things that are dangerous," he said. "If I'm driving down the road, I can pass 200 parked cars and not notice them but if I see an accident, I will stop and look."

Mark Regnerus, a sociologist at the University of Texas in Austin, said a "confirmation bias" might be at work. People like statistics that reinforce their beliefs. If people are fearful that marriages are in trouble, he said, they'll tend to believe statistics that confirm those fears even if those statistics aren't exactly right.

Regnerus said using bad statistics about marriage can be appealing because bad news can motivate people to action, but it can also undermine the credibility of a pastor's message.

"I am glad pastors want to strengthen marriages," he said, "and bad news can be galvanizing... but we trust our pastors to tell us the truth."

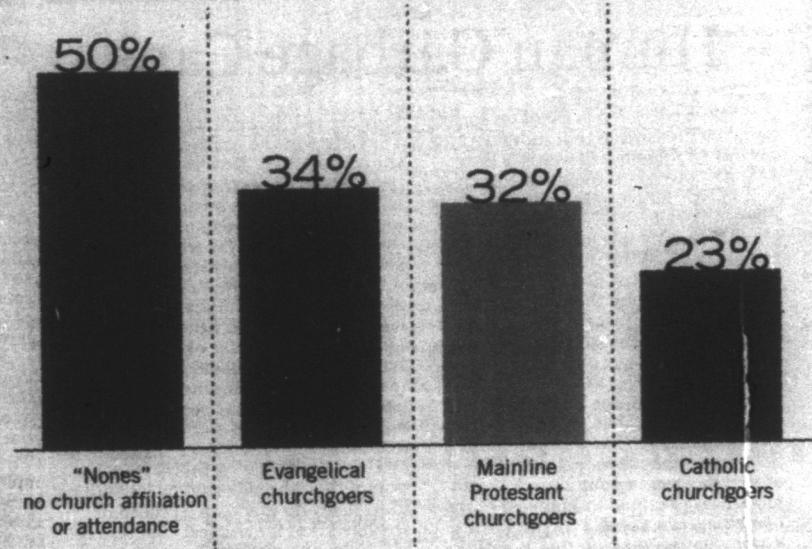
Bad tippers? Really?

Marriage isn't the only subject where perceptions about Chris-



The truth about: Divorce Rates in America

The truth is when church attendance is factored in the results, believers who attend church are less likely to divorce than people who do not show up.



Source: General Social Survey (GSS)

tians don't match the statistics. It's also the case with tips Believers leave servers at restaurants.

Earlier this year, a trip out to eat turned into a nightmare for Alois Bell of the World Deliverance Ministries Church in Granite City, Ill. Their server added an automatic tip to the bills, in keeping with company policy.

Bell was not pleased. "I give God 10%," she wrote on the bill. "Why do you get 18?" The server posted the check on Facebook and it went viral. She eventually was fired, while Bell apologized and indicated after her note made headlines that she'd left a cash tip.

Turns out that server wasn't the only one to have a bad run-in with church folks. Karen Swallow Prior, an English professor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., worked her way through college as a waitress. Christians were notorious for being bad tippers, she wrote in a piece for Christianity Today's website.

"My fellow servers called them the 'Holy Rollers,'" she wrote. "Knowing there would be little, if any, tip left at the end of their meal, the servers saw the Christians' robust attempts at 'friendliness' instead as pushy and arrogant. The memories still pain me now."

A study from Michael Lynn of Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., and Benjamin Katz of HCD Research in Flemington, N.J., showed that, overall, Christians are pretty good tippers. Their online survey of 1,068 Americans found that the average Christian tipped 17% for good service. Only 13% of Christians left a smaller tip for good service.

There are a lot Christians out there and since people tend to remember bad news, a few bad tippers give all the other Christians a bad name.

Figures don't lie, but...

Statistics about the future of the church also give pastors and other church leaders a hard time, like this one: *94% of Christian young people leave the church never to return.*

It was used to promote a major Christian conference several years ago and is partly true. Many young people do tend to drop out of church. A 2009 LifeWay Research study of 1,000 young Protestants found that seven of 10 stopped attending church for a time after high school.

A few more details are in order, however. The students surveyed had all attended

church for at least a year in high school. Most dropped out because of a life change such as going to college and just over a third had come back to church by age 30.

The idea of anyone dropping out of church is a concern, but there's no sign that the vast majority of young people are forsaking the church.

Another bad statistic was used by a megachurch pastor to promote a Christian conference: *There are more left-handed people, more Texans, and more pet cats than evangelicals in America.*

Actually, one-third of the claim is true. There are more cats (and dogs) than evangelicals in the U.S., but not Texans or southpaws.

While there are about 95 million cats in the U.S., according to the Humane Society, there are between 50-75 million evangelicals (Religious Congregations & Membership Study, 2010, and Pew Research). That's more than the estimated number of southpaws at 30-45 million and Texans at 26.6 million, according to the U.S. Census.

Bad statistics persist because they work, at least in the short term. They can help sell books and tickets to conferences, make

good sermon illustrations, and get people in church fired up. The problem, said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research, is that bad statistics don't solve real problems.

It's difficult to solve a problem when you don't understand it, Stetzer said. Too many bad statistics can also undermine a leader's credibility. Get too many facts wrong, and it's harder for people to trust.

Getting it straight

Stetzer said Christians should view all statistics with healthy skepticism. That's especially true if a statistic is found in an advertisement. Ads, Stetzer said, are used to sell things. They're not particularly concerned with getting the facts right. Also, be wary of any statistic that can't be verified.

"Ask, 'How do you know that?'" Stetzer said. "If you can't think of a way to verify a statistic, it's probably not true."

Stetzer also said to beware of stats that don't match reality, noting, "It's OK to apply your own censor, to say this doesn't make sense."

It's important to realize all research is imperfect, and context matters. Researchers don't have unlimited resources. They can't interview or poll everyone. Instead, they interview a representative sample of people, asking a few questions.

Go to the source. Find out who did the research, how many people they interviewed, and what specific questions were asked, before assuming the research is valid. For example, a poll from professional researchers using a large sample will likely be more reliable than an informal poll taken by a professor of the students in class.

Finally, look at more than one study. "To understand the whole picture, responsible researchers look at various studies, their methodologies, and their results," Stetzer wrote in a 2010 story about bad statistics for Christianity Today.

"We reach bad conclusions when we latch onto one finding of one study, drag it out of context, and proclaim it from the rooftops without knowing whether our interpretation is justified."

Facts are our friends, as Stetzer often says. Just make sure the facts are true.

Adapted from *Facts & Trends* magazine on the web, published by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville. Edited for style and clarity.

Bad statistics persist because they work, at least in the short term. They can help sell books and tickets to conferences, make good sermon illustrations, and get people in church fired up. The problem... is that bad statistics don't solve real problems.

It has been decades ago since garbage was still garbage. Over the years it has evolved from just the practice of throwing out leftovers into the backyard or into a trash pile to the science of waste management that is a huge industry. In communities all across the nation, there are large tracts of land where huge trucks bring loads of thrown away material and where bulldozers and specialized equipment spread it out and put layers of dirt over it. There have been times when people who work in the waste disposal industry have stopped work because of working conditions or low pay and suddenly a city, a county or an area is crippled under the crush of unusable, smelly, and sloppy leftovers of life. With the density of population across areas of our nation, we cannot live without having a process of disposing of trash and unwanted material.

While we may rarely think about it, there are moments when you just suddenly realize how important and appreciated these people who are involved in the science and work of garbage elimination should be. For me, a wakeup moment took place right after Christmas when there were boxes, paper, turkey carcasses and such that were all waiting to be removed. I was wondering what day the garbage collection was going to take place. I certainly did not want to miss having everything ready for them to pick up because it was already beginning to get in the way, and some of it was beginning to produce its own foul odor. I just took a guess as to when they were supposed to come during the holiday schedule, and I got it right. I felt better about life itself after the garbage



Directions

With Jim Futrai, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Human Garbage Cans

was taken away. I am thankful for the people who work in that industry and for our city managers who work to keep the process moving smoothly.

As I was processing what was going on during that time, I thought about the fact that people are not supposed to take in all of the waste, the trash and the garbage of life. Sometimes the garbage is a wrong thought. Sometimes it is an evil word. Sometimes it is the gossip about someone else's life. Sometimes it is our own wrong thinking. It could be a grudge. It could be a warped opinion. It could be just sheer meanness that we hold inside.

Have you ever known someone in your neighborhood, community or maybe even in your church that just always seemed to know all of the bad about everybody? If you want to know what is going on that is sinister, wrong, hurtful and hateful, you can talk to them and you will get the lowdown. Now, of course, usually

they are not doing or saying anything. They are just the garbage collector of the community. Now they may be just people who are extremely interested in everybody else's business or they may be folks who just love to dig in the trash. Either way when they start picking the stuff up without realizing it they may be loading up the canisters of their brains and not be aware when it begins to spoil their lives.

In the love chapter of I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul shares with us a great insight about this problem in just a phrase. He said that people who have matured, grown up and have Godlike love flowing in their lives "thinketh no evil" (I Cor. 13:5). A literal translation of that phrase could be something like, "They do not keep a record of wrongs." Let me suggest that we are not to be human garbage collectors. Maybe in your own life, you can see that the trash pile has gotten stacked pretty high. The smell is getting

pretty intense. You do not have to wait until spring cleaning to act and clean up the mess that is there.

In Isaiah 38, the prophet came to Hezekiah with a special word for a need in his life. Hezekiah was sick and was going to die. Isaiah brought this word, "Set your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover" (Isa. 38:1). Clean up the stuff because you are going to die and not live. In the context of the passage, it almost seems like Hezekiah was far more concerned about dying than he was about cleaning up. Sometimes the cleaning up will lead to life being better every day.

How do you clean up your house, your heart, your mind and your life? Well, I must tell you that God has a great waste management program. It is a cleansing program and a cleanup of every aspect of your life program. It is all provided by Jesus, His wonderful Son, who can save us and rescue us from the putrefaction of all that would destroy us. Turn it over to God! Give all of that stuff to God's memory bank. According to the Word of God, He will forget all of that stuff never to remember it against us again.

Maybe looking back over this last year, or two or three, some of those things that have come to hurt you, haunt you and become imbedded in the very fabric of your life need to be cleansed in a way that only God can enter into your life, release it and do away with it. Call upon Him today and allow Him to do His mighty work in you. Then when you are refreshed and renewed go out and bless others.

The author can be contacted at directions@mcb.org.

College News

In other College News:

► Nominations are being accepted for the 2014 Small Business Leadership Award, given annually by the Area Development Partnership (ADP) and William Carey University (WCU). Outstanding ADP-member small businesses within greater Hattiesburg and with less than 100 employees are eligible for the award, which will be presented at the Small Business Leadership Award Luncheon at 11:30 a.m. on May 7 at Southern Oaks House and Gardens in Hattiesburg. Brent Christensen, executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority, will be the keynote speaker. Nomination forms are available online at www.wmcarey.edu, at the ADP or at the WCU Office for Advancement. Completed forms may be sent by mail to the Small Business Leadership Award, c/o William Carey University School of Business, WCU Box 18, 498 Tuscan Avenue, Hattiesburg, MS 39401; by fax at (601) 318-6281; or by email at cdale@wmcarey.edu. For information on sponsorship opportunities and nominations, contact Dr. Lynne Houston at WCU at (601) 318-6231 or by email at lhouston@wmcarey.edu.



WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY recognized its inaugural Dyslexia Therapy graduate cohort with a Red Coat Ceremony on October 5, and the students, who began courses in the summer 2013, are now in the internship phase of the program. The 23 students, representing public and private schools statewide, are currently working with dyslexic students in a supervised clinical internship program that will continue until the completion of the two-year program. WCU will graduate the first cohort in May 2015. The students (in random order) are Jennifer Acosta, Bay St. Louis; Morgan Allsup, Petal; Marcia Barksdale, Ocean Springs; Sue Boutwell, Hattiesburg; Tracie Craft, Vancleave; Hollie Davis, Brandon; Hollie Hinton, Laurel; Tina Litton, Petal; Heather Maxwell, Summit; April McCrary, Meridian; Donna Meloling, Magee; Jo Ann Mestayer, Waveland; Lynda Miller, Duncan; Regina Mills, Waynesboro; Cindy Peden, Oak Grove; Jessica Powell, Petal; Sara Sensenig, Laurel; Greta Singletary, Picayune; Brandi Smith, Brandon; Pearlie Smith, Oak Grove; Kelly Sumrall, Petal; Courtney Thrash, Heidelberg; Susan Whitcomb, Hattiesburg, and Rai Thompson, instructor of dyslexia therapy. WCU is currently taking applications for the 2014 cohort, which will begin classes in July 2014.

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Outspoken Texas pastor's comments on Obama defended

DALLAS (BP and local reports)—First Church, Dallas, pastor Robert Jeffress is creating a stir with comments he makes in his forthcoming book, charging President Barack Obama's policies have "paved the way" for the coming usurpation of religious liberties and moral law by the Antichrist.



JEFFRESS

Critics have balked at naming Obama and the Antichrist in the same sentence, but noted theologians said Jeffress' example, when read in context, properly frames end-time prophecies in light of current events.

"I don't sit around in my office thinking up controversies, but I do use controversy to shine the light on Jesus Christ," said Jeffress, the pastor of the 11,000-member church.

The outspoken Jeffress, who has delivered the Bible Treasures series of devotional at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, knew the quotes issued by the publishing company for his new book, *Perfect Ending: Why your eternal future matters today*, would be provocative, but he approved their use in the press release.

No stranger to controversy, Jeffress drew attention during the 2012 presidential elections when he referred to Mormonism as a cult. On the eve of the last presidential election, he warned his congregation against voting for Obama.

Jeffress stands by his comments, arguing each ensuing media eruption allowed him to share the Gospel from a national platform.

With the Jan. 6 release of a press statement by Worthy Publishing, Jeffress has come under fire yet again. Using current events to illustrate how a future world ruler could easily subvert moral law, Jeffress named names.

"Although President Obama is certainly not the Antichrist, his policies are paving the way for the Antichrist," Jeffress stated in the book.

Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, said, "I understand what Jeffress is saying," but added he would have couched it in broader terms.

As Western governments grow in power and influence beyond the limited authority intended by God, there is a corresponding decrease in individual freedom, Patterson said. "To exceed that has always

been dangerous and portends a day when government will be irresistible and totally corrupt. Is the Obama administration guilty? Yes, and so are almost all Western governments."

Craig Blaising, a Southwestern Seminary professor of eschatology and theology and member of First Church, Dallas, said the pastor's comments are nothing new or out of character. Jeffress preached a similar sermon series in 2013.

"Dr. Jeffress was not identifying the Antichrist and he emphatically said so," Blaising said.

In the book and from the pulpit Jeffress revealed a pattern of influence that allows a leader to overturn religious and moral laws. Using a current president as an example is acceptable and prudent, Blaising said.

Patterson said, "If mentioning present sitting politicians in an effort to identify them with someone in Scripture, that is a failed policy and a hermeneutical mistake... but as I understand it, Pastor Jeffress did not make that mistake. He simply pointed out that some of the policies of the Obama administration were clearly [contrary to] the Bible and set the stage for the coming of a world ruler."

Jeffress questioned how the Antichrist would be able to thwart political and personal resolve, forcing people to subjugate their will to the collective will of government with so little opposition. He found the answers in recent U.S. legislation.

"Jeffress describes how our current political leaders are enacting laws and issuing court orders that offend or trespass against God's Law as shown in the Book of Daniel — such as the baker in Colorado who was ordered, against his religious convictions, to create a cake for a gay wedding or face punitive fines," the press release stated.

Jeffress said he wanted to enlighten and engage Christians, not forecast the coming apocalypse. "I am not Harold Camping reincarnated," Jeffress quipped, referring to the widely popular radio Bible teacher who predicted the world would end May 21, 2011.

Camping died last year on Dec. 15.

Blaising said, "There are a whole lot of people saying a lot of things that are not supported by the Bible. They may have a little bit of truth with a lot of imagination."

Pastors need to speak the truth about end times and can do so as an effective apologetic approach to witnessing, but Blaising said there will be increasing pushback from an increasingly secular society.



Sean Gladwell/Shutterstock.com

N. Korea, Somalia top list of Christian persecutors

WASHINGTON (BP) — North Korea remains the most dangerous country in which to follow Jesus, and Islamic extremism continues to be a dominating factor in the persecution of Christians around the world, according to a new report.

The annual study announced on Jan. 8 by Open Doors ranked North Korea as the world's top persecutor of Christians for the 12th consecutive year. Meanwhile, the report showed Islamic extremism is the driving force for Christian persecution in 36 of the 50 countries at the top of Open Doors' World Watch List.

Open Doors, which seeks to strengthen the persecuted church overseas, named the top 10 persecutors of followers of Christ in 2013 as (in descending order):

- North Korea.
- Somalia.
- Syria.
- Iraq.
- Afghanistan.
- Saudi Arabia.
- Maldives.
- Pakistan.
- Iran.
- Yemen.

North Korea far outdistanced all other countries with a score of 90 on Open Doors' list. The other top 10 countries all evidenced Islamic extremism as a source for their repressive treatment of Christians.

During the same time, Syria led in the number of Christian martyrs with 1,213, Open Doors reported. Nigeria was second with 612. Those two countries ranked far above all others in the number of Christians martyred for their faith.

Southern Baptist public policy specialist Barrett Duke described the report as "deeply troubling."

"Christians are facing irrational, hate-filled persecution just for being Christian," said the vice president for public policy and research at the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville. "These are our brothers and sisters in Christ."

Followers of Jesus in the United States can help their persecuted fellow Christians, Duke told Baptist Press in a written statement. "We must pray more fervently on their behalf. We must also urge our government to do everything in its power to intervene to protect these vulnerable communities."

"Christians can start by urging President Obama to fill the still-vacant office of ambassador-at-large for religious freedom at the State Department. The Senate can start by passing the Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act of 2013, which will create a special envoy for religious freedom to focus on many of the places where Christians are facing the worst persecution for their faith."

"The church in America must not be silent. Our brothers and sisters in the Lord need us to speak up on their behalf."

Open Doors USA President David Curry called the report "a wake-up call to Americans to become more aware of these atrocities and restrictions on religious freedom."

"Often completely unaddressed in the West is the fact that Christians are the largest persecuted minority in the world," Curry said in a written release. The countries on the World Watch List "are targeting Christians; imprisoning, punishing, and even in some cases murdering people who choose to express privately or publicly their Christian faith."

In its report, Open Doors pointed to increased persecution in countries described as "failed." A failed country, according to the organization, is "a weak state where social and political structures have collapsed to the point where government has little or no control."

Six of the top 10 persecutors, Open Doors reported, are classified as failed countries: Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen.

North Korea, which practices communism and the cult-like worship of the ruling Kim family, continues to imprison from 50,000-70,000 followers of Christ in concentration camps, prisons, or prison-like conditions, according to Open Doors.

In North Korea, possessing a Bible could result in execution or a life sentence in prison.

The countries that rose most dramatically in Christian persecution in the study were:

■ Central African Republic, which was not on the list last year but is No. 16 this year.

■ Colombia, which moved from No. 46 to No. 25.

■ Sri Lanka, which is No. 29 after not being on the list in 2013.

The West African country of Mali showed the most improvement, dropping from No. 7 to No. 33 after the French military halted the threat of an Islamic takeover.

The rankings, which Open Doors began compiling in 1991, are based on not only violence against Christians but the degree of pressure in private life, family life, congregational life, community life, and national life.

The complete list of 50 countries may be viewed online at worldwatchlist.us.

Just for the Record



The youth groups from **CENTRAL AND TANGIPAHOA CHURCHES**, Pike County, presented the musical Christmas This Year at their respective churches Dec. 8 and 15.



The children of **CEDAR GROVE CHURCH, COLUMBIA**, presented Shepherds, Sheep, and a Savior Dec. 22



The children of **NEW BETHLEHEM CHURCH, MAGEE**, presented songs and a live Nativity scene for the Christmas program; From the Manger to the Cross.

Some of the children and youth of **MT. PISGAH CHURCH, CARROLLTON**, performed a Christmas program about the birth of Christ. Lanny Haley, pastor.



The senior citizens of **CALvary CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, enjoyed their Christmas luncheon at Mid-dendorf's, Akers, La. On their return they stopped at Berry Town to purchase Christmas fruit.



The children of **NESHoba CHURCH, UNION**, presented their Christmas program, The Birth of Jesus.



The youth of **FIRST CHURCH, EUPORA**, dressed up as their favorite Christmas characters as part of their annual Christmas party.



The Young at Heart of **FLOWOOD CHURCH, RANKIN COUNTY**, went to Thomcrown Chapel in Eureka Springs, Ark.

Just for the Record



PHEBA CHURCH, PHEBA, installed new signs Jan. 4 to celebrate their 125th anniversary during 2014. A kickoff ceremony with fellowship and prayer was held Jan. 5. Shown are Tommy Millsaps, Roger Johnson, Sid Fondren, and Frank Walker.



EDON CHURCH, STRINGER, ordained youth and music minister Ed Meadows to the ministry Dec. 15. Shown are Brent Barker, Meadows, and pastor John Davis.



The 5th and 6th grade Sunday School class of **MCADAMS CHURCH, SALLIS**, conducted a Christmas basket project. The students provided treats for each basket, and chose two people to receive a basket. Shown are Jeffrey Jones, Erin Nail, and Chloe Cloninger.

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for registration and information.



Jim Hess, minister of music and senior adults and associate to the pastor at **FIRST CHURCH, VICKSBURG**, retired after 29 years of service. He was honored by the church Jan. 5. Shown are pastor Matt Buckles and Hess.



CALVARY CHURCH, VICKSBURG, presented a dinner theater aboard the Cruise Ship CBC at Christmas. Shown are women singing Look Who Just Checked In.



WEST LAUREL CHURCH, WEST LAUREL, recognized Sharon Knight for 46 years of perfect attendance in Sunday School. Shown are Knight and Buddy Blackmon.



LOOP ROAD CHURCH, PERRY ASSOCIATION, held a fellowship hall note burning service Dec. 29. Shown are Tracey Malone, Pug Malone, Buddy Love, Danny Griffith, Sonny Freeman, Dan Jones, and Danny Newell.

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In other Church News:

► **Bunker Hill Church, Columbia**, will host Ronnie Cottingham in concert Jan. 19, 6 p.m.

► **Hurricane Creek Church, Sandy Hook**, exceeded its \$4000 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal.

► **Star Church, Star**, will host a reception honoring pastor Victor Bowman and his wife, Martha, for 20 years of service on Jan. 26, 2 - 4 p.m. A card basket for well-wishes will be available.

Californians battle to repeal transgender restrooms law

SAN FRANCISCO (BP) — California voters could decide in November whether to repeal a transgender restrooms law allowing students to choose which restroom or locker room they'd like to use based on what gender they believe themselves to be.

A coalition of conservative groups called Privacy for All Students collected enough valid signatures to merit a full check of the signatures submitted, according to a random sampling by the secretary of state's office.

County election officials have until Feb. 24 to review the signatures and determine whether the issue qualifies for the ballot.

The California legislature last year passed the law, which was signed by the governor and drew widespread criticism for its infringement on the rights of students who could be put at risk by sharing facilities with classmates of the opposite sex. The law took effect on Jan. 1.

California's transgender law followed a similar transgender rights directive issued last year by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

The transgender developments, the recent ruling in favor of polygamy in Utah, and the momentum gained by same sex marriage advocates after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Defense of Marriage Act, indicate these are "strange new days in America at the start of 2014," culture commentator Owen Strachan said.

"We have all heard of song remixes. We are in the midst of a gender and sexuality remix in this country," Strachan, executive director of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, told Baptist Press. "Our society has essentially taken for granted that men and women belong to different genders."

To reverse this common consensus is to question the basic realities of life, Strachan said. "Things that are taught in Scripture and that we know from the witness of our conscience are being shaken to their very foundations, so the United States finds itself in the midst of a revolution on the issue of gender."

If gender distinctions are obliterated in American culture, then "God's intelligent design is obscured. More than that, it is judged wrong," Strachan said.

Gender distinctions "owe to the mind and will of God," Strachan said, so denying distinctions between the sexes is denying God's authority to rule over His creation.



"A culture that rebels against the common-sense reality of sexual distinctions is sending itself into a freefall from a moral standpoint," said Strachan, assistant professor of Christian theology and church history at Boyce College, the undergraduate school of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Many of us take gender and sexuality for granted, and we assume that men and women are a little bit different but not that different but in reality, though we share a great deal as image bearers and as human beings created in God's likeness, we are different," Strachan told Baptist Press.

Even the most basic biological and physiological differences between men and women point to our unique call as Christians. In other words, men and women recognize that our bodies are telling us something about the life we are to live, the roles we are to play, and the way we think about the basic realities of our existence."

If America continues on this trajectory, Strachan said, the nation will position itself for civilizational disaster including profoundly confusing future generations.

"If we collapse the distinctions between the sexes that owe to the mind of God and to His design, which we can observe with our senses, then we set our children up to not simply be confused about gender and sexuality but to wander into darkness and to miss the goodness of God's bodily design and physiological creation," Strachan warned.

Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

BIBLIOCRYPTER

NGB TJTO AKT CGO GN DEO REDT OGA

AG HT DLOLCATBTY FOAG, HFA AG

DLOLCATB, EOV AG SLJT KLC PLNT E

BEOCGD NGB DEOX.

DEBY ATO: NGBAX-NLJT

Clue: J = V

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 8:48

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004. © 2005

Submission Guidelines



The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hand copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530, FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

PROJECT

cont. from p. 1

LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, the organization behind True Love Waits.

Trueblood sees sexual purity as an important issue for students today, yet he also believes that alone should not drive the conversation. The core message of True Love Waits has always been that

"purity is possible because of Jesus and is for Jesus."

The True Love Project, released in mid-December, brings that to the forefront. "Jesus is the destination, and our worship of Him needs to take center stage," Trueblood said.

The refocused message has been inherent in True Love Waits from the beginning, said Richard Ross, one of the co-founders of the movement two decades ago.

Ross, now a professor of student ministry at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, and Jimmy Hester, a previous director of student ministry at LifeWay, launched the initiative in 1993 based on ideas sketched out on napkin during a coffee shop meeting.

Since then, an estimated three million students around the world have made a True Love Waits pledge. In Uganda, the program was a key factor in lowering the prevalence

of HIV/AIDS rates, which were above 30% in some parts of the country, to below seven percent.

King, a youth evangelist and teaching pastor at NewSpring Church in Anderson, S.C., said he aims to build on that legacy. "I was part of the movement when it began. I spoke at one of the very first True Love Waits DiscipleNow weekends."

Trueblood added that in the midst of a culture that is sex-saturated, today's generation needs "to clearly see how the Gospel impacts their purity and how their choices in purity are about more than their sexual decisions."

"God has used True Love Waits in an incredible way for two decades," Trueblood said, "and now He has opened the door for the True Love Waits message to be restated, to once again point people to the Gospel through this very important issue in our culture."

Purity can be a key act of worship, Ross noted. "This is about a lifetime of purity," he said. "This is not a temporary thing, hoping a husband or wife will show up. Rather, this is something that I can do for my King."

The new eight-session curriculum captures the Gospel-centric focus Ross and Hester implanted in the original True Love Waits, and Trueblood said he intends to bring that focus back to the forefront.

By beginning lessons in the broader paradigm of the story of the Bible — Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration — Trueblood believes The True Love Project's lessons will provide the proper perspective for later lessons dealing specifically with sex and purity.

Trueblood said churches and student ministers can expect their students "will be challenged to live a pure life in Jesus' power." For King, that

"God has used True Love Waits in an incredible way for two decades, and now He has opened the door for the True Love Waits message to be restated, to once again point people to the Gospel through this very important issue in our culture."

Ben Trueblood

director of student ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources

means "being found faithful on judgment day, not just retraining from sex."

While purity has always been at the core of the True Love Waits message, "I want people to know they are pure because Jesus purified them from sin, not because they have perfect behavior and have never had intercourse or looked at porn," King said.

The good news is that temptation, lust, porn, sex, shame, and guilt are no match for the grace Jesus offers us."

That meshes well with what Ross has said from the beginning: "Point kids to Jesus. Only He has power enough to grip their heart and their will."

Trueblood and King agree. Whether it was on a coffee shop napkin, the National Mall, a village in Uganda, or a classroom at a local church, True Love Waits and now the new resource, The True Love Project, has always had one message at its core — only Jesus can make a person pure.

A documentary on the True Love Waits movement by LifeWay Films will be released in early 2014. For more information, visit TrueLoveWaits.com.

MS POSITIONS

FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH IN ECRU, MISSISSIPPI, IS TAKING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER. You may send a resume or questions to Pastor Jonathan Baker at jonathan.baker@fbcocru.com.

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AT ITS HEIGHT — The True Love Waits program recorded a milestone in 1994 when more than 210,000 commitment to sexual purity cards were staked on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. A LifeWay Christian Resources program aims to reach the current generation of young people with an updated curriculum entitled, The True Love Project. (BP photo)

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THE VILLAGE VIEW



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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

OCTOBER 2013

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Jimmy & Wendy
Johnston
Cheryl McCraw
Mr. & Mrs. Ronnie A.
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Sherry Coleman McGraw
Mrs. Gerry McGraw
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Mamie Powell
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Manton
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Hammond & Family
Rowe Rhett
Cecil & Penny
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Ms. Jane Rigby
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Jenkins
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Dr. & Mrs. Ken
Barron

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Barron
Mrs. Deborah Dickens
Patricia & Annie Pearl
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Hasselman
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Johnston
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"Doc" Oakman
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Rev. & Mrs. Billy Kent Smith

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Mr. & Mrs. Robert
"Doc" Oakman
Lois Bains
Mr. & Mrs. Fred Ervin
Mr. Billy Baker
Mr. & Mrs. Bud
Varner
Mrs. Modean Baker
Mr. & Mrs. Billy Joe
Williams
Mr. Jim Ballard
Mr. & Mrs. Robert
"Doc" Oakman
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Faith & Hope SSC
FBC Louisville
Mr. & Mrs. Jack
Fulton
Jeff Barber
Mr. & Mrs. Bud
Doherty
Rev. Leo Barker
Krista & Mary Lee
Michael

BCV EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The BCV employs Christian, mission-minded, husband and wife teams, without dependent children or pets, to serve in the position of Houseparents. The couples must be mature Christian adults with personal integrity, character and of good reputation with standards and ethics expected of any member of The Baptist Children's Village staff.

They receive a salary with benefits and are provided a private bedroom and meals while on duty. The primary job responsibility of Houseparents is to maintain a home-like environment that models healthy, Christian family living for children and youth residents. They are the primary caregivers and help with everything from transportation and homework to laundry and meals when on duty.

Houseparent responsibilities are varied and somewhat dependent upon which campus and to which cottage the couple is assigned. However, all Houseparents need to be in good physical, mental and emotional health. They must be cooperative and comfortable working in a team environment.

To apply for the current Houseparent openings, please contact Celeste Cade at ccade@baptistchildrensvillage.com or 601-922-2242.

A complete job description and application may be downloaded at www.baptistchildrensvillage.com.

Value Every Life! • Psalm 139:1-10, 13-16, 23-24

"Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so; Little ones to him belong; They are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me, The Bible Tells me so."

These words were written in 1860 by Anna B. Warner to explain the Christian message to Chinese people who did not know about Jesus. It is often considered a children's song and it is indeed but it is not only for children. If you are in a worship service where people choose their favorite hymns it most often will be a senior adult who ask to sing "Jesus Loves Me." The profound Biblical truth that Jesus loves me applies to anyone who sings the song.

Psalm 139 helps us understand more of the depth of God's love for us. In The Message Psalm 139:13-16 reads:

"Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!"

"Body and soul, I am marvelously made!"

"I worship in adoration—what a creation!"

"You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how

I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you.

"The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day."

God loves and has a plan for everyone He knit together in their mother's womb. The Holman Christian Standard Bible translate

P s a l m
139:16: "all
[my] days
were
written
in Your
book
and
planned..."

G o d ' s
plans
for
you
are

good and loving since "God is Love," 1 John 4:8 (HCSB).

A major emphasis of God's Word is that God wants and plans the best for us. The prophet Jeremiah says it this way: "For I know the plans I have you" – [this is] the LORD's declaration – "plans for [your] welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. You will call to Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you," Jeremiah 29:11-12.



Explore the Bible

with Don Hicks

Jesus wants you to know He loves you and you are a valuable creation of God with a future and hope. You can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, find the Lord's plan for you. Paul explains this in Romans 12:1-2: "Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by renewing

your mind,

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(HCSB).

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obvious to any thinking person that murder would end the victim's chance of living out God's plan and finding God's perfect will. So, the Ten Commandments taught us not to murder. But do you remember the wording Psalm 139:15 in The Message: "You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an

open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth." Killing someone growing from conception to birth is murder and is an attack on God's good and perfect will for that person. Therefore, abortion is an attack on God's living plan for the baby He is personally knitting together.

God's good and perfect will, his plan for a person He has created, is not short term or limited. It certainly will last for all of natural life and not include the murder of the elderly or infirm. Actually, God's good and perfect will includes all of eternity for those who accept the everlasting life provided by Jesus through faith in Jesus and Jesus alone.

David said it this way in the Psalm we are studying today: "Search me, God and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way," Psalm 139:23-24 (HCSB).

The 139 Psalm ends with the same thought that David had begun with: "LORD, You have searched me and known me," Psalm 139:1 (HCSB). The next several verses explain the Psalmist's understanding even amazement that God's right hand will hold on us everywhere we go.

Hicks is a member of Brandon Church, Brandon.

Is Every Life Sacred? • Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

The Mighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, treasures you. You are His special creation, formed with purpose. David, the shepherd king of Israel, who penned Psalm 139, knew this well. God revealed Himself to David time and again. David declared in verse 1 that the Lord had searched him and known him. There was nothing about David that the Lord did not know, and there's absolutely nothing about any of us that He does not know. Sometimes we are standoffish with others to keep them from knowing us, but there's no way we can keep God from knowing us even if we prefer not to know Him. David said that the Lord knew even when he sat down and when he got up and understood his thoughts afar off. Here we see the omniscience of God for He sees all things past, present and future and also the omnipresence of God in that He is present everywhere.

David overflowed with worship as he considered the goodness and faithfulness and tender mercies of God in dealing with him through the years. What wonderful things God had taught him. He knew where David had been and where he was going. He knew the path that he would take and when he would take it and the Lord was acquainted with

all of David's ways, just as He is ours. He even knew the words in David's tongue before he ever uttered them. David said to the Lord, "You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand." (vv. 5-6, NLT)

Perhaps you think that God just related to David that way because he was special. So are you. In Matthew 10:29-31 (NLT),

Jesus said, "...But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very

hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid. You are of more value to God than a whole flock of sparrows." God gives us life and it is sacred because it is a gift from His holy hand. Our birth was not a happenstance. David acknowledged that the Lord created him and wove his body together in his mother's womb. He praised God

that He was fearfully and wonderfully (marvelously) made and said in verse 16 (NIV), "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Perhaps you have felt like your birth was an accident and that you're inferior to other people. You are not. You are precious to God. He wove you together in your mother's womb and wrote your

days in His book. Or, perhaps you feel that because of your age you're of no value to anyone. P s a l m
92:13-14

says otherwise. "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." Perhaps you are housebound, either by your illness or a loved one's. God can always use intercessors. Evangelist D. L. Moody told about being invited to preach in a church in England. God

blessed mightily and over 10 days, 400 souls were saved. He learned that an invalid lady had prayed for two years that God would bring D. L. Moody to that church. She was still bearing fruit despite her frailty. Perhaps, tragically, you took a life. There is still forgiveness, hope and a future for you through Jesus Christ

Though life is not easy, it is sacred and precious because God is with us. To feel his presence in the midst of pain and sorrow is to know the most precious comfort! We should with David proclaim, "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!" (vv. 17-18, NLT)

"God knew you, long before you were born or even conceived. He knew you, thought about you, and planned for you. When you feel discouraged or inadequate, remember that God has always thought of you as valuable and has had a purpose in mind for you." (Life Application Bible Commentary, Jeremiah 1:5 note)

Foster is a member of Murphy Creek Church, Louisville.

Bible Studies for Life

with Patsy Foster



CHARGED

cont. from p. 1

the Homewood Police Department did confirm in a news conference Jan. 2 that investigators had established

a motive and have physical evidence.

One of Shahan's attorneys, John Lentine, said statements about their client's fleeing the country were misleading.

"Some of the inferences that were put out there in

the news conference made it sound like Richard was trying to leave the country and never come back," Lentine said, according to al.com. "The chief is saying, 'We've got our man,' then saying it's an ongoing investigation. ...The reality is

they've always looked at Richard, and they didn't bother to look any further than that."

Karen Shahan's body was discovered last July 23 around 11:15 a.m. inside her home in Homewood. Police still have not confirmed how

she was killed although some reports state she was stabbed to death.

Richard Shahan was jailed for investigative purposes on Aug. 7 and released Aug. 9 without being charged.



FINDING A WAY OUT — Uwe (right) met Zeina (not her real name) on the streets of Hamburg, Germany, while giving out hot drinks and hugs in an effort to befriend victims of human trafficking. As Uwe and his ministry partner Ann have done for many others over the years, they have taken in Zeina and are helping her turn her life around, find a job, and establish a church home. (IMB photo)

Ministries fight for lives of human trafficking victims

HAMBURG, Germany (BP) — Zeina (not her real name) has been on the streets of Hamburg, Germany, for several years. She came from Africa by way of Spain, where her children live and depend on her income from prostitution for their schooling and livelihood.

She longs for her children to have a better life than she has had and works hard to provide that for them. Her "work" has led her to the streets. As an uneducated foreigner, her options are limited. No other jobs pay as well as the prostitute's wage.

Zeina wants out. She recognizes that this life is not a good one, but getting out is not as easy as it sounds.

Uwe is a German man committed to helping women find a way out. His heart is tender and broken over the plight of women caught in the trap of prostitution. For 10 years, he has gone to the red-light district of Hamburg to walk the streets, hand out chocolates and hot drinks, and have real conversations with these desperate women.

He met Zeina one night. Their lives have been intertwined ever since. Uwe and his ministry partner Ann have become family to Zeina. They take her to church and help her find other options for work. They encourage her and pray with her.

Even so, Zeina isn't out yet. It's a slow process. Years of abuse and exploitation put her on the streets, and it usually takes years of healing to free someone. When they asked her to share her story with others and to ask for prayer, she was too ashamed to talk publicly about her lifestyle.

Uwe was not disappointed with her reaction but encouraged her to distance herself

from her life of prostitution and find a new identity.

Gaby Wentland, who works with victims of human trafficking, works extensively with women who are exploited. She said one common denominator of these women is years of sexual abuse, exploitation, and deception from childhood. They have an average of 10 abortions each, and these abortions leave physical and emotional scars.

Human trafficking victims are constantly exposed to all kinds of sexual diseases. The daily sexual activity is unnatural and causes emotional and physical problems. Women have reported to Wentland that their body eventually feels dead, leaving them with no natural responses.

Others have said when they were raped for the first time, they felt like their hearts were shattering.

"Proverbs describes a man going to a prostitute as a man on his way to death," Wentland explained. "There is a spirit of death involved when you are involved in prostitution."

For this reason, healing takes a long time. "It's a process, and I think God will take them step by step just as He took us all step by step," Wentland said.

Working through layers of self-deception, self-hatred, low self-esteem, fear, exploitation, abuse, and neglect is a process. Wentland encourages victims not to give up the fight.

Wentland is excited and encouraged to watch what God is doing as she sees women finally finding freedom from their past. She said when they are rescued by God they are stronger than most.

"Their hearts are broken, and these hearts can only be

restored by Jesus Christ," she said. "He came to set the captives free, to open prison doors, and then when these girls are being restored back to Jesus they are the most powerful women in the world. I'm not even discouraged. I know an army of women and men are rising up and becoming strong warriors for Jesus."

One example is Jana (not her real name), a Muslim girl who began to pray to Jesus to rescue her. She had access to a computer and found Mission Freedom, an organization that Wentland works through to provide a safe house for victims.

Jana called and asked if they could help. They asked for her address, told her to leave the house, hide for 20 minutes, and they would be there. Jana took the risk, and found freedom.

When Jana walked into the safe house, she knew she was in a Christian place. She told the women there that she had prayed for Christians to save her. She asked for a Bible and soon gave her life to Jesus.

She wrote her whole story on a piece of paper and then burned it. She asked the staff to join her as she took the ashes to the back garden, buried them, and planted a rose bush on top. "I want to bury my old life," she said. "This is my new life now."

It's not simple. Jana struggles with some depression, but she's on her way to wholeness.

Zeina's journey is different but has begun nonetheless. Uwe is sure of God's work in her life.

"Jesus has already started His work in her, and I have a lot of confidence that it won't be long until Zeina can leave prostitution. Because she wants to... she has decided... and she lives that out very clearly," Uwe said.

Church's rough start breeds perseverance

CINCINNATI (BP) — Michael Clary had reached the end of his rope. The 35-year-old church planter had been in Cincinnati nearly 18 months. Other than the Baptist association's director of missions, he didn't know anyone when he arrived. After slowly and surely putting together a core team, an admittedly poor leadership voice threatened to tear it all apart.

People were questioning his leadership. Some left the church, and Clary was questioning himself. "We had gone from zero to 30 and back down to 15 after a year and a half," said Clary, a North American Mission Board (NAMB) missionary. "I wondered, 'Are we sunk?'"

Clary sat in a large restaurant near the University of Cincinnati campus that had become his makeshift office and prayed, read his Bible, and journaled about his sins, his doubts, his dreams and everything else he could think of.

Then Clary asked himself if he should continue or if he had learned a painful ministry lesson and the church should disband.

It would end what likely was the first Southern Baptist church plant within Cincinnati's city limits in nearly 30 years, said Dennis Holmes, Send North America: Cincinnati city coordinator with NAMB. Holmes has served as a church planting catalyst and director of missions in the city since 1984.

God's answer to Clary was unmistakable — keep going, so Clary did. To demonstrate how much he trusted God, he took it a step further. Instead of waiting to grow the core group back up before launching the church, he circled a date on the calendar for the first public worship services: July 10, 2010, just five months away.

Two weeks after giving the church's future over to God, Clary presented his vision to

the core group. "We're going to make disciples," he said. "We're going to share our faith. We're going to build community. We're going to study Scripture. We're going to do and be the things that a church should be, and we're not going to stray."

The vision had "no gimmicks, no church tricks," and it resonated, Clary said. The number of people in the core group more than doubled by the end of the year, replacing all the people who had left during the leadership crisis several months earlier.

Yet most church-planting experts would say the core group of 35 people was too small to try a public launch, so Clary kept praying and God showed up along with 70 people at the inaugural worship.

Since he figured many of attendees had been well-wishers simply wanting to support the first service, Clary thought the numbers would drop. They did, to about 55. But they never dropped below that again.

More than 400 people now attend Christ the King Church most weekends and 45 adults have been baptized.

Much of the growth has come from word of mouth rather than a coordinated marketing campaign. Now the church is making plans to launch its first daughter church in southwest Cincinnati in the next few months. The new church planter is from Christ the King.

Clary credits the local Baptist association as an important part of Christ the King's launch and the new church plant.

"We've gone from total despair to the sky is the limit because the Lord has restored our dream of what we want to see in this city — a church that's making disciples, building bridges racially, and reaching people from all different backgrounds," Clary said.



A NEW BROTHER — Church planter Michael Clary (left) embraces Brett Wert after Wert was baptized in a portable baptismal at Christ the King Church in Cincinnati. When Clary started Christ the King Church in 2010, it was the first Southern Baptist church plant within Cincinnati's city limits in nearly three decades. The church has baptized 45 people since its launch. (BP photo courtesy of Christ the King Church)